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ABSTRACT

As college and university professionals prepare for the 21st century they need to be cognizant of the student population they will be serving and how to maximize educational and developmental opportunities. No one theory adequately provides a comprehensive explanation of the processes that manifest themselves during the college experience. All theories and theorists, regardless of magnitude, have made their own particular contribution to the field of human growth and development. Each contribution aids in describing the various processes of growth and development. One ongoing process for all individuals is that of satisfying personal need deficits. Understanding personal need deficit satisfaction requires the acceptance of the premise that all individuals are unique. The uniqueness of individuals is not a new concept for student affairs professionals. The concept of balance provides student affairs professionals with a beginning for understanding and explaining the growth and development phenomenon that occurs in late adolescence and early adulthood, especially during the college experience. Balance is a psychosocial phenomenon whereby an individual assimilates and incorporates new information and experience in order to satisfy existing need deficits so as to pursue a state of homeostasis. Balance is a multi-faceted phenomenon, a state of being. For college students the concept of balance means that each student individually makes the necessary adjustments and adaptations to optimize the college experience. (ABL)

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THE PHENOMENON OF COLLEGE STUDENT DEVELOPMENT: A PERSPECTIVE OF BALANCE

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ABSTRACT

It is redundant to note the development of human beings is a multidimensional process. Theorists, in general, have provided fairly accurate descriptions of how people grow, develop, and age throughout the life span (Maddox, 1987; Whitner, 1988). Even though the number of developmental theories have increased over the years, there are degrees of overlap and duplication among them. In addition, most theories address a major life event or a specific aspect of a person's life with a focus on physiological development, cognitive development, or the influences of culture, environment, or the ethos of a society. The purpose of this paper is to examine how some theories and some student affairs professionals believe human beings grow and develop during a specific life event or a right of passage -- the college experience. A recommendation for viewing this particular developmental period or life event is also made.

THE PHENOMENON OF COLLEGE STUDENT DEVELOPMENT: A PERSPECTIVE OF BALANCE

The most widely recognized perceptions of college student development are those which are primarily based on the developmental needs of late adolescence and early adulthood. During the past few decades, two theories -- Piaget's structuralism and Erickson's functionalism -- have provided the basic foundation for which to explain human development during this time frame. Also, during this time, there have been theoretical additions, alterations, changes, and suggestions made. Today, there seems to be a silent consensus that each new theory of college student development or each new theoretical addition, change, or suggestion makes an important contribution in explaining how students grow and develop during their college experience. Therefore, it may be hypothesized that there are no comprehensive theories, nor are there any single theories which adequately provide a total explanation of the growth and development processes of college students. In general, most theories focus on different variables or different aspects of development during the college years. However, there are some theories and some theorists who have had more influence than others and a greater impact when defining and describing what happens to young people during their college careers.

Theories

Student affairs professionals, according to Knefelkamp, Widick, and Parker (1978), have important work to do and pride themselves in getting it done. However, the consequence of this demanding work is that it leaves student affairs professionals little time for theorizing. The lack of theorizing translates into an inadequate blueprint for a very complex job. The authors noted that one of the pioneers in student services, W. H. Cowley (cited in Knefelkamp, Widick, and Parker, 1978), pointed out "...that student services professionals are currently struggling with the same problems that affected them twenty-five years ago, and the confused and irritating situation of the past has continued to prevail" (p. vii). Since Cowley's statement the number of models and theories of college student development has grown, increased and, in some instances, have been reissued. Yet, the proliferation of college student development models and theories has not been a panacea for student affairs professionals. Instead, a new or different situation now exists. Knefelkamp, Widick, and Parker (1978) stated:

> Clearly, we no longer lack models of college student development. We have models, many of which represent careful data-based effort. What we also have are several new problems: (1) how to keep up with the knowledge explosion; (2) how to make sense of the many models; and (3) after understanding them, how to translate them into useful and helpful tools in our work as student personnel

professionals. (p.ix)

Chickering (1969) believed the modernization of society created a developmental period that did not previously exist. He stated that "Extending from age seventeen or eighteen into the middle or late twenties, the period is different from adolescence and different from adulthood and maturity" (p.2). Chickering wrote:

> A developmental period of young adulthood does seem to exist now, a period during which certain kinds of changes occur or strong potential for such change exists, a period during which certain kinds of experiences may have substantial impact. This period merits special attention because mounting evidence indicates that patterns established at this time tend to persist long into adulthood. And because so many young adults will move through this period in a college setting, it merits <u>special attention</u> so that institutions of higher education can better serve society and more effectively help young persons move productively from adolescence to adulthood. (p.2)

To support his beliefs, Chickering (1969) proposed a theory of college student development that postulated seven major areas of development: competence, emotions, autonomy, interpersonal relationships, purpose, identity, and integrity. Chickering called these areas "...vectors of development because each seems to have direction and magnitude -- even though the direction may be expressed more appropriately by a spiral or by steps than by a

straight line" (p.8).

Certain conditions need to exist on a college campus for the mastery of each vector, according to Chickering (1969). He hypothesized "...that each college can accelerate or retard development in each vector, and past research suggests six major sources of influence: (1) clarity of objectives and internal consistency, (2) institutional size, (3) curriculum, teaching, and evaluation, (4) residence hall arrangements, (5) faculty and administration, and (6) friends, groups, and student culture" (p. 144).

Chickering (1969) envisioned colleges as developmental communities. He combined the needs of a student's psychosocial phase of development with the environmental demands of a college community. Widick, Parker, and Knefelkamp (1978) stated:

> Chickering's model of student development, while psychologically sound, is not the work of a "pure" developmental psychologist; it is the work of an integrator and synthesist. He has logically combined existing theory and evidence extrapolating a pattern of developmental changes in such a way as to make the role of the college environment more apparent in those changes. Chickering is that rare entity, a scholar-practitioner who stands between and joins theory to practice. Although this bridging role is vitally

> important, it is not without liabilities. Developmental psychologists will find gaps in his delineation of student development; practitioners will want more specific guidance than Chickering's work provides. Given his purpose, however, his work reflects careful and systematic thought and stands as a major contribution to our understanding of student development. (p.20)

The most critical theories of development in late adolescence and early adulthood, according to Giddan and Price (1985), are the psychosocial (adaptional, maturation, or stage) and the cognitive (ego and moral stages, character types) theories. The authors provided an excellent overview and synthesis of the numerous classifications of developmental theories related to youth as they struggle in an attempt to explain and describe what happens to young people during the college experience. The complexity and difficulty of sorting through and making sense of the maze of theories is exhibited by Giddan and Price as they titled the theory synthesis chapter of their text, "Student Development: Uncertain Knowledge" (p. 23). Searching for the ultimate answer, the authors suggested:

> If we have a hazy blueprint of a new stage or pair of stages,...there may be a pre-adult stage of cognitive development roughly from ages 16 to 22 or, if we divide

> Keniston's youth stage from 16 to 25 into two periods, we may have one stage which is pre-adult (from 16 to 20) and a second stage preceding and including adult thinking (from 20 to 24), both stages bisected by college. (p.32)

Explaining and describing the college student development phenomenon may be an impossible task. Giddan and Price (1985) are not alone in their quest. According to Astin (1984), most investigators who study the highly diverse problems related to student development frequently do not look at the same variables or employ the same research methodologies. And, if they do, they often use different terminology to discuss and describe the variables or outcomes. Astin stated that "Even a casual reading of the extensive literature on student development in higher education can create confusion and perplexity" (p. 297). In an attempt to reduce or resolve the confusion and perplexity, Astin postulated "...a theory of student development, labeled the student involvement theory, which I [Astin] believe is both simple and comprehensive" (p. 307). The theorist commented:

> My own interest in articulating a theory of student development is partly practical -- I would like to bring some order into the chaos of the literature -- and partly self-protective. I am increasingly bewildered by the muddle of findings that have emerged from my own research in student development, research that I have been engaged in for more than 20 years. (p. 297)

The traditional pedagogical theories of education provided Astin (1984) with the major impetus for him "...to examine these implicit pedagogical theories and show how the theory of student involvement can help tie them more directly to student development" (p. 299). Astin raised the question, "In what way does the theory of student involvement relate to these traditional pedagogical theories?" He then provided an answer to his own question by saying, "I believe that it [involvement theory] can provide a link between the variables emphasized in these [traditional pedagogical] theories and the learning outcomes desired by the student and the professor" (p. 300).

Joseph Katz (cited in Giddan & Price, 1985) recognized the need for a comprehensive theory or an integration of theories to explain and describe student development. Commenting on Giddan and Price's effort, Katz stated:

> The authors envisage a possible unified theory of student development. Such a theory would have many components and would include the differing perspectives of investigators who focus on cognitive, emotional, and environmental factors. It would embrace multiple theoretical systems, such as those of cognitive psychology, psychoanalytic psychology, Piagetian psychology. It would integrate different methodological approaches ranging from survey research to case studies. Such a synthesis is an as yet uncompleted task. But the authors make the challenge very convincingly and take

> several important steps towards a synthesis. While many other studies have done their bibliographical obeisance and provided surveys of the literature, the authors attempt to achieve a theoretical integration. (p. vii)

The paucity of research to validate theoretical models of young adult cognitive development is understandable, according to Mines and Kitchener (1986). The authors stated, "The field is really in its infancy. In addition, the models are frequently complex and assessment is time consuming, expensive, and idiosyncratic" (p.xii). From a structuralist's point of view, the authors presented a wealth of information related to current theoretical perspectives of young adult cognitive development. However, the authors stated that the theoretical perspectives need to be tested must and withstand the rigors and demands of research.

A review of the literature which focused on the concept of basing student programs on the developmental needs of college students, as hypothesized by developmental theories of adolescence and young adulthood, was conducted by Thrasher and Bloland (1989). The authors sought empirical research articles that included the implementation and evaluation of theory-based student development intervention programs. From the vast amount of literature that was scrutinized, the authors found only a small proportion to be research based. Thrasher and Bloland concluded:

> Although the student development movement has grown, there has been little critical comment on it, almost no

> analysis of its principles and precepts, and scant nexus between theory and practice. Student development is struggling for recognition in its own right as a legitimate field of study, and it is not yet clear that it has a solid scientific foundation. A comprehensive analysis of student development research is necessary to determine what is being done in the field and if it is adequate. (p. 547)

Even though the literature review produced a meager amount of empirical research, Thrasher and Bloland (1989) commented, "...the preponderance of what evidence exists appears to endorse the probability of a student development effect. Its dimensions and concomitant variables remain to be uncovered" (p. 553).

What are theorists and other interested student affairs professionals trying to convey about the theories of student development and about the field of student development in general?

Recapitulation

Thrasher and Bloland (1989) observed that we need empirical evidence to support what appears to be a student development effect, even though its dimensions and accompanying variables remain unknown. The scant amount of research related to student development is understandable, says Mines and Kitchener (1986). These authors contend that the field of student development is too young and research which possibly could be supportive of student

development is too time consuming, too expensive, and too complex.

A lack of student development models and theories no longer exists, according to Knefelkamp, Widick, and Parker (1978). These authors believed that today's problem for student affairs professionals is how to conceptualize the current information and knowledge. In their quest to explain and describe the development of youth, Giddan and Price (1985) make an attempt to conceptualize the current information and knowledge by integrating and synthesizing the numerous and varied developmental approaches and theories of young people. The two authors very astutely suggested that a new or different phase of development may exist between adolescence and young adulthood. A comprehensive theory of student development, according to Katz (cited in Giddan & Price, 1985), would integrate and embrace the multitude of theoretical systems of human development. Katz stated that Giddan and Price make an important contribution with their synthesis toward a comprehensive theory of the development of youth, but he added, "Such a synthesis is an as yet uncompleted task" (p. vii).

Astin (1975) presented a theory of student development which he contends is both simple and comprehensive. However, he later states, "I am increasingly bewildered by the muddle of findings that have emerged from my own research in student development..." (Astin, 1984, p. 297). Even so, Astin believed involvement theory can provide a link between the traditional pedagogical theories of education and learning outcomes.

Chickering (1969) combined the psychosocial needs of college

students with the demands of an academic environment. However, Widick, Parker, and Knefelkamp (1978) say that Chickering "...joins theory to practice. Although this bridging role is vitally important, it is not without liabilities" (p. 20).

Scrutiny of student development literature reveals that no one theory or concept adequately or comprehensively describes or defines the processes of development which occur in the lives of students during their college experience. Nevertheless, it appears and may be argued that each tenet, principle, concept, and theory of student development makes an important and unique contribution. These framework contributions, however, have contributed to two perplexing situations for most student affairs professionals. The first has been the uncertainty of professionals to decipher which theory, concept, or model is appropriate to implement or adapt at a specific institution or in a particular program. The second situation, as research suggests (Thrasher & Bloland, 1989), has been the inability of student affairs professionals to produce explicit and valid documentation and justification of the developmental needs of college students to other higher education professionals and administrators.

Student affairs professionals need to rethink and reevaluaate their approaches to college student development. Instead of trying to integrate and make sense of the numerous and varied theories and concepts of development, student affairs professionals need to focus on how students satisfy their own personal need deficits as they grow and develop toward and into young adulthood. A

perspective that can aid student affairs professionals as they prepare for the challenges of the 21st century is one that takes into account the uniqueness of students -- their individuality -- their differences.

The Concept of Balance

As college and university professionals gear-up for the 21st century, they need to be cognizant of the student population they will be serving and how to maximize educational and developmental opportunities. As suggested, no one theory adequately provides a comprehensive explanation of the processes that manifest themselves during the college experience. All theories and all theorists, regardless of magnitude, have made their own particular contribution to the field of human growth and development. Each contribution aids in describing the various processes of growth and development. One ongoing process for all individuals is that of satisfying personal need deficits. Understanding personal need deficit satisfaction requires the acceptance of the premise that all individuals are unique. The uniqueness of individuals is not new for student affairs professionals. The assumptions and beliefs (NASPA, 1987) that have guided and shaped the work of student affairs professionals for years list the following:

> EACH STUDENT IS UNIQUE.
>
> Students are individuals. No two come to college with the same expectations, abilities, life experiences, or motives. Therefore, students will not approach college with equal skill

> and sophistication, nor will they make equally good choices about the opportunities encountered there. (p.10)

The phenomenon of an individual's uniqueness in seeking personal need deficit satisfaction was presented by Abrahamowicz, Whitner, Sanz, and McIntire (1990). The presenters made the point that the skills of adjustment and adaptation are generally encountered by students in the classroom. The students:

> ...then inductively transfer and develop these skills either on campus or in the work-a-day world. The questions of "How much?" and to "What degree?" a student needs a specific to address a deficit is totally dependent upon each individual student. The student's ability to determine, acquire, and balance a specific to fulfill a need deficit is an important step toward that student's development. (p. 9)

The concept of balance provides student affairs professionals with a beginning for understanding and explaining the growth and development phenomenon that occurs in late adolescence and early adulthood, especially during the college experience. Balance is a psychosocial phenomenon whereby an individual assimilates and incorporates new information and experiences in order to satisfy existing need deficits so as to pursue a state of homeostasis. Balance is a multi-faceted phenomenon. It is dynamic, active, and continuous. It is both conscious and unconscious. It is personal.

Balance is a state of being -- individuals move through disequilibrium seeking and utilizing all known and all available resources in search of tranquility.

For college students the concept of balance means that each student individually makes the necessary adjustments and adaptations to optimize his or her college experience. College and university professionals need to be aware of the turmoil and struggles that students encounter as they transcend a critical developmental phase in their lives -- the college experience. No one theory or concept is unique to this phenomenon. It is the combination of theories and concepts that is distinctive. Together, the theories and concepts have their own meaning and define their own special contribution. For student affairs professionals, the concept of balance is a beginning.

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